

ASSYRTIKO

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BACKGROUND

Assyrtiko (ah-seer-tee-KOH) is a variety unique to Greece. Until relatively recently, it was restricted to several islands in the Aegean Sea, and best known for its wines from the island of Santorini. In recent years the variety has been planted on the mainland, particularly in Macedonia, Attiki and Peloponnese. Synonyms include Assirtico, Assyrtico and Asyrtiko. The total planted area in Greece was 902ha in 2010, of which 70% is currently on Santorini. The vineyard area on Santorini has declined substantially over the past 30 years due to reduced export demand for its wine and increased land use for tourism. Although Assyrtiko is the second most important white wine variety of Greece (after Savatiano), it only makes up 2% of the total national area. DNA analysis has revealed that Assyrtiko has a parent/offspring relationship with both Gaidouria and Platini. Also, there is no genetic link with either Spanish or near Eastern varieties which suggests that a possible origin from those places is most unlikely. Outside of Greece, the first commercial planting was made in 2012 in the Clare Valley of South Australia by Jim Barry Wines—the first wine was available for industry assessment in 2015. There are also two very small recent plantings in California.

VITICULTURE

Budburst and maturity are late (it ripens two to five weeks after Merlot in Greece). Vigour and yield are moderate. Bunches are medium to large and compact with large berries. It is tolerant of downy and powdery mildews and is also said to be drought tolerant. On Santorini, old vines are traditionally trained to a basket system (kolouras) and cane pruned; however, newer vineyards (including the mainland) are trellised.

WINE

Because Assyrtiko has the ability to retain high levels of acidity, even under hot climatic conditions, wines are fresh with a strong acid backbone and low pH. Descriptors include citrus, green apple and floral. It is prone to oxidation. On Santorini, Assyrtiko is mainly used in blends with Athiri and/or Aidani (75% or more Assyrtiko) and less commonly for single variety wines. It is usually harvested at relatively high Baumé for a white variety, and wines of 13–14.5% alcohol are common. In Attiki and Macedonia where Assyrtiko is usually blended with Sauvignon Blanc or Semillon, wines are broader with more intense fruit character.

For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (marcel.essling@awri.com.au or 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.